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Walker Gets Life Term; Judge to Oppose Parole

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BALTIMORE, Nov. 6—John Anthony Walker Jr., the admitted spy for the Soviets who masterminded one of the most damaging espionage rings in U.S. history, was sentenced today to life in prison by a federal judge who vowed "to do everything in my power" to ensure that Walker is not paroled when he becomes eligible in 10 years.

In the likely closing chapter of the family espionage drama that launched what came to be known as the year of the spy, U.S. District Judge Alexander Harvey II said he would "strenuously recommend" that Walker never be freed.

Imposing the sentences provided for in a plea bargain with the Justice Department, Harvey told Walker's son, Michael Lance Walker, that he would also recommend that the 24-year-old former Navy seaman serve his entire 25-year prison term. Michael Walker would be eligible for parole after eight years and four months.

As John Walker, 49, stood impassively before him, Harvey said that the former Navy chief warrant officer betrayed his country for "pure cold cash" and still fails "to appreciate the enormity of these grave crimes," which spanned nearly 18 years.

"One is seized with an overwhelming feeling of revulsion that a human being could ever be as unprincipled as you," Harvey told Walker.

Invoking his own military service during World War II, Harvey said he had "utter contempt and disgust that a serviceman could bring the ultimate disgrace to the uniform that you have."

Harvey told Michael Walker, who was serving aboard the nuclear powered aircraft carrier USS Nimitz at the time of his arrest, that he understood that "as an immature 21-year-old you were easily led into these traitorous activities."

But, Harvey said, "However young you were, Mr. Walker, you were nonetheless an enlisted serviceman . . . Your duty was to defend your country. You chose to betray it."

Although judges' views are not binding on the question of when a prisoner is paroled, "obviously, federal judges' remarks are always taken seriously," said Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert N. McDonald, the prosecutor in the case.

John Walker's defense lawyer, Fred Warren Bennett, protested Harvey's announced plans to convey his views on Walker's release to federal parole authorities as "inconsistent with the spirit and intent and we think the substance of the plea agreement." In effect, Bennett said, Harvey's action would transform the sentence into one of life without the possibility of parole.

"You can think what you want, Mr. Bennett," Harvey responded sharply. "That is what I will do."

The sentencing, which took place in the large ceremonial courtroom in the federal courthouse here, came more than a year after father and son pleaded guilty before Harvey on the day John Walker was scheduled to stand trial.

Present for sentencing were John Walker's ex-wife, Barbara Joy Crowley Walker, whose telephone call to the FBI nearly two years ago unmasked the spy ring, and the daughter whom John Walker unsuccessfully tried to recruit into espionage, Laura Mae Walker Snyder. At the prosecution table sat the FBI agent in charge of the case, Robert Hunter, one of two agents who accosted John Walker in a Rockville Ramada Inn in the early hours of May 20, 1985, ordering, "Drop the weapon; FBI."

Michael Schatzow, the former chief prosecutor in the case who is now in private practice here, came to the sentencing, as did a number of the FBI agents, Navy personnel and intelligence officials who have been involved in investigating the

case or debriefing Walker since he pleaded guilty Oct. 28, 1985.

For nearly 18 years, first on his own and later with material supplied by his close friend Jerry Alfred Whitworth, a retired Navy communications expert, Walker provided the Soviets with copies of the "key cards" containing the daily-changing Navy codes, and design manuals for the construction of the coding machines, which enabled the Soviets to decipher more than a million classified messages, according to an affidavit filed by Rear Adm. William O. Studeman, the director of naval intelligence.

Soviet defector Vitaly Yurchenko told U.S. intelligence officers that the KGB "considered the Walker-Whitworth operation to be the most important" in its history, and that the information obtained from the ring would have been "devastating" to the United States in the event of a war, Studeman said. The Soviets paid Walker about \$1 million for the information, prosecutors said.

Walker, who ran a Norfolk private detective agency after retiring from the Navy in 1976, was arrested after FBI agents had trailed him on a circuitous route to rural Poolesville in western Montgomery County. After following Walker, agents found a bag full of classified documents carefully disguised as trash that he had left at a drop for his Soviet contact.

Prosecutor McDonald asked Harvey to impose the agreed-on life sentence for Walker despite his "persistent escape plans" and lingering "areas of doubt" about whether Walker is telling the truth about when the spy ring started and when his older brother, retired Navy Lt. Cmdr. Arthur James Walker, joined the operation.

The plea agreement, which some military officials opposed as unduly lenient, nearly unraveled this fall after John and Arthur Walker consistently failed lie detector tests about the origins of the espionage ring. Some military officials urged that the agreement be scrapped so that the government could seek a stiffer sentence that would delay John Walker's eligibility for parole and send a stronger message about the consequences of espionage.

Arthur Walker, who said he started spying in 1980, years after

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he left the Navy, was sentenced last year to life in prison. Whitworth, the only person arrested in the spy ring outside the Walker family, was sentenced in August to 365 years in prison.

Speaking before Harvey imposed the sentences, Bennett said that John Walker "is remorseful for his actions" and had cooperated with the government, testifying at Whitworth's trial and submitting to extensive debriefings, as "an attempt to atone at least in part for the wrongs he committed."

Walker's "crimes are serious, they were flagrant, they consumed 18 years," Bennett said. "He wears no badge of honor for what he has pleaded guilty to." But, Bennett said, "Mr. Walker owned up to his crimes, admitted his guilt" and "has kept his contract" with the government.

Michael Walker's lawyer, Charles G. Bernstein, told Harvey that Michael Walker suffered from having an alcoholic mother and an unloving father who is "one of the worst persons that I believe your honor will have occasion to sentence" and who "led him down the path of treason."

John Walker pleaded guilty to three counts of espionage, for which he was sentenced today to two life terms plus 10 years, all to be served concurrently. Michael Walker pleaded guilty to five counts of espionage, for which he was sentenced today to two 25-year terms and three 10-year terms, also to run concurrently.

Neither John Walker nor his son took the opportunity to make a statement before Harvey imposed the sentences. John Walker said that his lawyer "summarized my feelings adequately. There is nothing I can add."